

IMAGE & LIKENESS



*Figurative Works from the Permanent Collection
of the Whitney Museum of American Art*

This exhibition was organized by
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*"Everybody thinks she is not at all like
her portrait but never mind, in the end
she will manage to look just like it."*

—Pablo Picasso on his 1906 portrait
of *Gertrude Stein*.

In the history of portraiture, different levels of realism have been used to express the physical likeness of a sitter. Traditional portraits also imposed a narrative content on that likeness, with conventions for depicting dress, posture, and ancillary objects that added a wealth of information to the portrayal. Cultural relevance, social, political, or economic status, genealogy, often occupation, and sometimes vocation could be "read" in the matrix of a portrait. Within each age, accepted laws of fidelity guided the reading, so that the identity and status of the sitter were recognizable—and indisputable. Truth, albeit idealized or glorified, was objective and concrete.

By the mid-nineteenth century, photography had made a more literal image available. And with George Eastman's Kodak camera the achievement of a "faithful likeness" was put into the hands of everyone. Kodak's advertising slogan—"you push the button we do the rest"—epitomizes the ease with which this technical phenomenon changed picture making. Portrait painters were no longer constrained by the dictates of objective realism, which was then more readily obtained in photographs. Instead, they turned to issues of formal interpretation, a shift that reflected the rise of modernism.

Modernism in the visual arts is a concentrated focus on the formal aspects of art making. The physical nature of material from which art is constructed—whether paint, clay, or steel—becomes a vital element in defining a "subject." Issues related to structure and visual language, in concert with this emphasis on raw materials, form the ideology of modern art. Art is therefore both self-referential and self-conscious—art for art's sake.

After World War II, conceptual issues of identity and representation joined these formal concerns. Notions relating to the psyche—the moral and spiritual center of the sitter—often become the subject of a work. Specific sitters fade away; we find instead portrayals of intellect, celebrity, passion, or politics. Likeness resides less in the recognition of physical traits than in the symbolic mythology of the sitter or, as is sometimes the case, in the fiction of the artist.

The quintessential example of a modernist portrait—one that expresses the unique relationship between artist and subject—is Picasso's *Gertrude Stein* of 1906. Frustrated with his efforts after more than eighty sittings, Picasso painted out Stein's face and replaced it with an austere Iberian mask. This simplified version, completed when Stein was not present, became a benchmark of stylized image making, a metaphor of the independence of form from visual reality. For many viewers, Gertrude Stein *became* the painting, just as Picasso predicted she would.

Although the works in this exhibition range from the clearly representational to the abstracted, all the artists share an impulse to transform the identity of their subjects. The style of each artist replaces what was once the form of traditional portrayal, thereby providing the viewer with a distinctive insight about the artist as well as the sitter.



Andy Warhol, *Ethel Scull 36 Times*

Nicholas Africano (b. 1948)

An Argument, 1977

Acrylic, oil, and wax on canvas,

69 × 85½ inches

Purchase, with funds from Mr. and
Mrs. William A. Marsteller 77.68

An Argument by Nicholas Africano depicts a psychologically charged moment. Two tiny, isolated men are frozen in a vast, alienating space, and one turns a back to the other. We intuitively understand that a tense interaction is taking place, and this, rather than the figures' physical features, becomes the focus of the work. Removing the background and dwarfing the figures, Africano tests our emotional capacity—our “response-ability”—with a minimum of extraneous details.

Robert Arneson (b. 1930)

Whistling in the Dark, 1976

Terra-cotta and glazed ceramic,

35¼ × 20 × 20 inches

Purchase, with funds from
Frances and Sydney Lewis 77.37

Robert Arneson's work combines contemporary ideas with the traditional forms of Roman, Etruscan, and classical French portraiture. The result is a portrait in which several frames of reference coexist. *Whistling in the Dark* is a self-portrait similar to others Arneson created throughout the seventies. He refers to these sculptures as “robust assassination”—incisive critiques of self-identity. The works are titled, often on the base of the sculpture, so that the wit or ironic comment is not lost. *Whistling in the Dark* was made at a time when the artist was seriously ill. This accounts for the ashen color and look of consternation on his face, while providing a heightened significance for the title.

William Bailey (b. 1930)

"N" (Female Nude), c. 1965

Oil on canvas, 48 × 72 inches

Gift of Mrs. Louis Sosland 76.39

Despite the obvious sensuality of the subject, William Bailey's *"N" (Female Nude)* is concerned with issues that have roots in classical still-life painting: the monumental figure reposes along one axis, balanced across the canvas in a horizontal line; the light is even and temperate. Although Bailey began with several drawings and sketches from the live model, the painting is a compilation of many such preliminary works, rather than a reflection of a single, studied pose. His transformation of pure reality into non-emotional, abstracted form reveals his ties to formalism. "What I want there," he has said, "is a tension between that expanse of a substantial plane and a light-giving, color-giving modifier for the object."

Robert Bechtle (b. 1932)

'61 Pontiac, 1968–69

Oil on canvas, 59¼ × 84¼ inches

Purchase, with funds from the Richard and Dorothy Rodgers Fund 70.16

(Downtown only)

Robert Bechtle is preoccupied with the ordinary. Like other Photo-Realists, he paints with detailed precision. But because *'61 Pontiac* is not a photograph, it lacks the immediacy or intimacy of a family snapshot. What the viewer sees instead is an image haunted by pathos, a family portrait in which the American Dream appears remote, subdued, and exceedingly banal. The subject of this work, then, is not the family group or any one of its members, but rather American values as such. *'61 Pontiac* depicts a visually static and emotionally fuzzy foursome—a picture that is more confrontational than it is revealing.



Robert Bechtle, *'61 Pontiac*

Jonathan Borofsky (b. 1942)

Running People at 2,616,216, 1979

Latex paint on wall,

dimensions variable

Purchase, with funds from the
Painting and Sculpture Committee

84.43

In 1969, Jonathan Borofsky began counting and planned to do so to infinity. These self-referential numbers then became part of his art, as in the wall painting *Running People at 2,616,216*. The work contrasts the real time in which it is viewed with the remembered time that the number signifies. Borofsky based *Running People* on a dream. He made drawings of the dream imagery, transferred them to a clear gel, and then projected them on the wall. The work can be reproduced at any scale and, at the owner's discretion, on the wall, floor, or ceiling. The figures convey an anxiety that refers both to the universal, through their schematic representation, and to the individual, through their specific numbering, which relates to the artist's experience.

Roger Brown (b. 1941)

The Entry of Christ into Chicago in 1976, 1976

Oil on canvas, 72 × 120 inches

Purchase, with funds from Mr. and Mrs. Edwin A. Bergman and the National Endowment for the Arts, and Joel and Anne Ehrenkranz, by exchange 77.56

Highly stylized and theatrical, *The Entry of Christ into Chicago in 1976* is typical of Roger Brown's distinctive style and approach to figurative art. The idea for this painting has its source in the Belgian artist James Ensor's 1888 painting, *The Entry of Christ into Brussels in 1889*. Brown's inventive narration depicts the entry of Christ—or rather the image of him—into the city on the back of a flatbed truck. Present-day Chicago can be identified by the Sears and Hancock towers. Three hundred and eighty figures, including Mayor Richard Daley and Cardinal Cody, watch the event while the rest of the city goes about its daily affairs. Brown's painting reveals how effective an anesthetic modern life can be.



Roger Brown, *The Entry of Christ into Chicago in 1976*

Chuck Close (b. 1940)

Phil, 1969

Synthetic polymer on canvas,

108 × 84 inches

Purchase, with funds from Mrs.

Robert M. Benjamin 69.102

Chuck Close's interest in faces is not unlike that of other realists. *Phil* is a scrutinized, literal description of composer Philip Glass. The artist wants to "see . . . rather than understand" the subject. His large-scale paintings focus only on the face, denying the viewer any other data, such as dress or setting, through which to understand the subject. Close makes photographs of his sitters, enlarges them, and then translates them to canvas with an airbrush. The works emphasize a particular person in a specific moment in time. But because they are a second generation removed from reality, they project a sense of neutrality.

Willem de Kooning (b. 1904)

Woman and Bicycle, 1952–53

Oil on canvas, 76½ × 49 inches

Purchase 55.35

(Fairfield County only)

Clamdigger, 1972

Bronze, 57½ × 24½ × 21 inches

Gift of Mrs. H. Gates Lloyd 85.51

Willem de Kooning's interest in the figure has been recurrent throughout his career. He concentrated on figure and portrait painting through the 1940s. In the early fifties he coupled figuration with abstraction in an evocative series using women as the central theme. De Kooning's handling of material combines spontaneous, distorting gestures related to organic or biomorphic shapes. Through this energetic tension, he successfully blends surface, volume, and emotion, whether in paint or in bronze. The gesture helps us see as well as feel the interaction of color and line. *Woman and Bicycle* and *Clamdigger* epitomize the modern artist's ability to capture the universal and generic nature of the subject rather than specific characteristics.

Richard Diebenkorn (b. 1922)

Girl Looking at Landscape, 1957
Oil on canvas, 59 × 60⅞ inches
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Alan H.
Temple 61.49

In the late 1950s, California painter Richard Diebenkorn began figurative works that included interiors with single figures. *Girl Looking at Landscape* reflects his interest in directness and simplicity. He looked for subjects he described as having some “juice,” but he seldom painted directly from the figure, preferring to compose from memory. “One may ask what emotional meaning this subject with her back turned to the viewer had for the artist,” Diebenkorn said. “A figure exerts a continuing and unspecified influence on a painting as the canvas develops. The represented forms are loaded with psychological feeling. It can’t ever just be *painting*.” Here Diebenkorn recognizes the empathy the viewer automatically brings to figurative work. Again, the identification of a psychological mood outweighs that of the individual sitter.

Duane Hanson (b. 1925)

Woman with Dog, 1977
Cast polyvinyl, polychromed in acrylic, with mixed media, life-size
Purchase, with funds from Frances
and Sydney Lewis 78.6

Duane Hanson’s startlingly real *Woman with Dog* shares the Photo-Realist interest in excruciating detail. But the work has a far more sardonic twist. In one fast tableau, the life of a simple Florida housewife is summed up through the homey symbols of a small dog, a flowered dress and carpet, and the daily postal call. This work differs from traditional portraiture, with its telling accoutrements, since it neither elevates nor idealizes the subject. Instead, Hanson uses realism as a psychological probe to reveal the woman’s isolation and loneliness.



Duane Hanson, *Woman with Dog*

Alex Katz (b. 1927)

Ada Ada, 1959

Oil on wood,

39 × 24¹/₈ × 6³/₈ inches

Gift of the artist 88.39

Place, 1977

Oil on canvas, 108 × 144 inches

Purchase, with funds from Frances
and Sydney Lewis 78.23

Ada, Alex Katz's wife and frequent model, is the subject of *Ada Ada*. In the group portrait *Place*, all the sitters are friends of the artist as well as well-known art world personalities. But Katz has removed all background information and extraneous detail, so that the work relishes its self-referential nature: these are art world figures in an art world painting. The individual character of each figure has been subverted by scale and idealization. In *Place*, Katz presents an over-sized grouping of compressed, flat, colorful figures. In *Ada Ada*, the repetition of the figure increases the psychological presence lost by the diminished scale. Katz's concern is to combine the realism of the past with the immediacy of the present. The mythology of the artist is as much at work here as is the identity of the sitter.

Alfred Leslie (b. 1927)

Alfred Leslie/1966–67, 1966–67

Oil on canvas, 108 × 72 inches

Purchase, with funds from the
Friends of the Whitney Museum
of American Art 67.30

In the early 1960s, Alfred Leslie abandoned Abstract Expressionism and began a series of large-scale, black-and-white portraits which, he said, “demanded the recognition of individual and specific people . . . straightforward, unequivocal, and with a persuasive moral, even didactic tone.” In this regard for realism, Leslie's work is tied to traditional portrait painting. However, by painting on a monumental scale, he is clearly concerned with principles of modernism. In this self-portrait he presents himself as a centered figure in a frontal pose, over-large, grim-faced, and lit by a cold artificial glow. His relaxed pose makes him appear to be secure and comfortable in his role as an artist and human being.

Robert Moskowitz (b. 1935)

Swimmer, 1977

Oil and pure pigment on canvas,

90 × 74¼ inches

Gift of Jennifer Bartlett 82.9

Swimmer represents a new sensibility and beauty in Moskowitz's painting: it is the first of his single figures set on sumptuous grounds. Moskowitz purchased the Prussian blue pigment used in this work because he liked the way it looked. Several months later, he rediscovered the pigment at a moment when he was searching for new forms. Applying the pigment with his bare hands was "like rubbing your hands on sandpaper . . . painful. I decided to go on and finish it." This physical act marks a triumph for Moskowitz's creative innovation. Just as he struggled for minimal but expressive forms, the swimmer struggles to stay afloat. The painting also sums up much that is ambiguous and metaphoric in modern art. "I think of the *Swimmer* as like being in New York City—trying to survive," commented Moskowitz.

Alice Neel (1900–1984)

Andy Warhol, 1970

Oil on canvas, 60 × 40 inches

Gift of Timothy Collins 80.52

Alice Neel chose Andy Warhol as her subject because "people's images reflect the era in a way that nothing else could." Warhol asked to pose half nude, revealing the scars of the abdominal wounds he suffered from a much publicized attempt on his life. In agreeing to paint Warhol in this manner, Neel legitimizes this unusual presentation by virtue of the sitter's art-celebrity status. He reveals all—she reproduces all. Despite his nudity, Warhol still appears remote and quite apart from our experience. We viewers are oddly removed from this dialogue between artist and sitter. We are neither repelled nor engaged, but are instead curious and mildly titillated by an insinuated attitude and style.



Alice Neel, *Andy Warhol*

Philip Pearlstein (b. 1924)

Female Model on Oriental Rug with Mirror, 1968

Oil on canvas, 60 × 72 inches
50th Anniversary Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Leonard A. Lauder 84.69

In *Female Model on Oriental Rug with Mirror*, Philip Pearlstein has stripped away emotion and attachment to the specific in order to concentrate on light, composition, and form. He is interested in the figure as such—an object to be painted realistically and in great detail, rather than as a vehicle for emotion or narrative. The model appears twice, but her mirrored reflection is as lifelike as the painted figure and both avoid display of personality. Flooded in light, with the face hidden, she is treated as a still life. Pearlstein denies the formalist dictum of pictorial flatness while adhering to its concerns for objective subject matter and the importance of paint on canvas.

Fairfield Porter (1907–1975)

The Screen Porch, 1964

Oil on canvas, 79½ × 79½ inches
Lawrence H. Bloedel Bequest
77.1.41

Fairfield Porter combines a painterly surface with naturalism in his seemingly bucolic work *The Screen Porch*. The painting seems “neutral”—unfettered by world events or urban stress. Nonetheless, we sense more than we see. Although it appears to be a sentimental and detached description of a summer day, it is in reality a psychological study. The people portrayed are Porter’s children, his lover (seated in the chair) and, on the outside of the screen porch, his wife. Porter is making an oblique statement about conflict, reality, and social values. This is a scene of alienation on several levels. By including the tools of his trade (far left), he suggests the conflict of the artist who works at home. The conflict between the artist and other family members is reflected in the submissive, introverted pose of the daughter and in the excluded wife.

Larry Rivers (b. 1923)

Berdie in a Red Shawl, 1953

Oil on canvas, 53 × 65 inches

Lawrence H. Bloedel Bequest

77.1.44

Larry Rivers' 1953 portrait *Berdie in a Red Shawl* depicts Bertha (Berdie) Burger, Rivers' ex-mother-in-law. She lived with him from 1950 until her death in 1957, taking care of the household and the two Rivers children. Berdie is presented as a monumental personality who is both vulnerable and enduring. Rivers combines expressive brushwork and muted colors that serve to underscore the formal act of painting as well as the character of the sitter. Close observation reveals a shadowed female presence on the far right—could this be Berdie's daughter, Rivers' ex-wife? or perhaps Berdie's alter ego? It is more likely, however, that it is Berdie herself, of whom Rivers painted many other double portraits.

David Salle (b. 1952)

Splinter Man, 1982

Oil and acrylic on canvas, two panels, 98 × 196 inches overall

Purchase, with funds from Mr. and Mrs. Charles M. Diker 82.12a-b

(Downtown only)

Splinter Man is a contemporary diptych with parallel but disparate ideas. David Salle uses found photographs, often from soft-porn magazines or other popular publications, for his subjects. The figure then, serves as a type, rather than as a known individual, and the artist's combinations reflect the pervasive media image. They form a kind of contemporary surrealism whose stream of consciousness comes from films, television, and printed matter and spills onto the painting from Salle's subconscious.



David Salle, *Splinter Man*

George Segal (b. 1924)

The Bus Station, 1965

Plaster, wood, formica, metal,
vinyl, cardboard, and leather,
96¼ × 59⅞ × 29¾ inches overall
Gift of Howard and Jean Lipman
81.22a-f
(Downtown only)

Walk, Don't Walk, 1976

Plaster, cement, metal, painted
wood, and electric light,
104 × 72 × 72 inches
Purchase, with funds from the Louis
and Bessie Adler Foundation, Inc.,
Seymour M. Klein, President, the
Gilman Foundation, Inc., the How-
ard and Jean Lipman Foundation,
Inc., and the National Endowment
for the Arts 79.4
(Fairfield County only)

For *The Bus Station* and *Walk, Don't Walk*, George Segal cast friends and family in plaster. By removing the external facade of color, he captured the strength of gesture so particular to each individual. "I chose never to emphasize obvious things like eye-brows, hair, skin tone, eyes—all the surface things by which we *think* we recognize our friends. But actually, we really recognize them a block away by the way they walk." Segal has the figures doing ordinary tasks in lifelike settings. The combination of scale, surface, and commonplace activity creates an empathetic bond between the work and the viewer.

David Smith (1906–1965)

Running Daughter, 1956

Painted steel,
100½ × 36 × 17 inches
50th Anniversary Gift of Mr. and
Mrs. Oscar Kolin 81.42

As a small child Rebecca Smith, eldest daughter of the artist David Smith, was photographed by her father running across the lawn. The exuberant spirit and beauty of that moment is captured in *Running Daughter*. The poetic movement, especially the lifted "foot" and flowing "hair," is as light and graceful as an arabesque, while the endless moving lines convey strength. This lyrical treatment emulates the bond of tenderness that existed between Smith and his daughter. The reference to the figure is, however, more allusive than defined. Smith wanted to avoid specific figurative associations. His work, he declared, was to stand on its own and not evoke reality.



David Smith, *Running Daughter*

James Surls (b. 1943)

Me and the Butcher Knives, 1982

Oak and mahogany,

101 × 37 × 39 inches

Purchase, with funds from an
anonymous donor 82.14

For *Me and the Butcher Knives*, a monumental self-portrait nearly 9 feet tall, James Surls carved trees found on his property in Splendora, Texas. He transformed the wood into a rough-hewn image by slicing, hacking, carving, and sometimes burning it. Surls relies on an anthropomorphic surrealism to find forms hidden within the natural shape of the wood. These brutal images are a combination of folk art, mystical symbols, and Mexican and Southwestern motifs. Because Surls is his own subject, he takes on the role of the desert sage, the storyteller of his personal voyage.



Andy Warhol (1925-1987)

Ethel Scull 36 Times, 1963

Synthetic polymer paint silkscreened on canvas, 79¼ × 143¼ inches overall
Gift of Ethel Redner Scull 86.61a-jj
(Fairfield County only)

Chairman Mao, 1975

Oil on canvas, 26 × 22 inches
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Peter M. Brant
76.44
(Downtown only)

Andy Warhol used familiar icons from soup cans to film stars as subject matter. These ubiquitous images from popular culture served as ironic comments on America's escalating acceptance of the mundane. *Ethel Scull 36 Times* and *Chairman Mao* were based on photographs and have the same feeling of detachment found in slick fashion magazines. We are drawn to the works because of their ambiguity: they seem to be both machine- and handmade; about art as well as the process of art; emotionally impotent and yet a powerful comment on the superficial. We have visually precise information about the subjects but no concrete knowledge of them. These works are perfect metaphors for those unknown idols that influence our lives.

Tom Wesselmann (b. 1931)

Great American Nude, #57, 1964

Synthetic polymer on composition board, 48 × 65 inches
Purchase, with funds from the Friends of the Whitney Museum of American Art 65.10

In *Great American Nude, #57*, Tom Wesselmann created an intellectually remote comment on the ideal. Here is the blond, perfectly proportioned, unblemished archetypal Western female. Cool and dispassionate, this “great” image is as unknown to us as that of other celebrated figures. Wesselmann admits that even the title refers to the “fiction” of America—the Great American Dream and the Great American Novel. Like Pop Art, the painting is self-consciously about the interfacing of art and popular culture.



Chuck Close, *Phil*

Whitney Museum of American Art, Downtown at Federal Reserve Plaza

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